

Election Monitoring of Online Media

August 17 – September 17, 2013

In connection to the Presidential elections of 2013, the Civic Development Institute (CDI) has renewed its media monitoring within the frameworks of the EU-UNDP funded project “Professional Media for Elections”. The monitoring is taking place from June 15, 2013 until November 15, 2013 and covers 12 most highly rated Georgian websites that are of a news portal type: netgazeti.ge, droni.ge, politico.ge, liberali.ge, news.ge, presa.ge, civil.ge, tabula.ge, garbonline.tv, for.ge, dfwatch.net, palitratv.ge. This report contains the media monitoring results from August 17 until September 17, inclusive.

Following key findings were identified during the third period of online media monitoring:

- Compared to previous monitoring periods, the online media is providing far more active coverage of electoral campaign of presidential candidates during the third monitoring period.
- Majority of websites are covering the activities of presidential candidates impartially and with more or less balance.
- There is a clear attempt of discretization of the ruling party’s presidential candidate on the websites presa.ge and droni.ge.
- Ethical norms and standards of journalism are regularly violated on the websites presa.ge, droni.ge and for.ge.
- Critical attitude to the issues has decreased even more on the English-language websites dfwatch.net and civil.ge (civil.ge publishes articles in English, also in Georgian and Russian).

- During the third monitoring period too, the following main problems are still present in the online media: superficial approach to the issues, little number of sources of information in certain articles, and mismatch between the headlines and the text.

netgazeti.ge

Articles on netgazeti.ge are distinguished with quite critical contents towards the authorities and the opposition as well in the third monitoring period, also with an active coverage of electoral violations and election themes. Despite there are articles with critical contents, the website manages to observe journalistic standards. Articles are balanced with diversity of respondents, they are impartial and facts of gross violation of journalistic ethics are never revealed anywhere.

Main emphasis is laid on the electoral themes, electoral violations and conclusions drawn by NGOs in this respect.

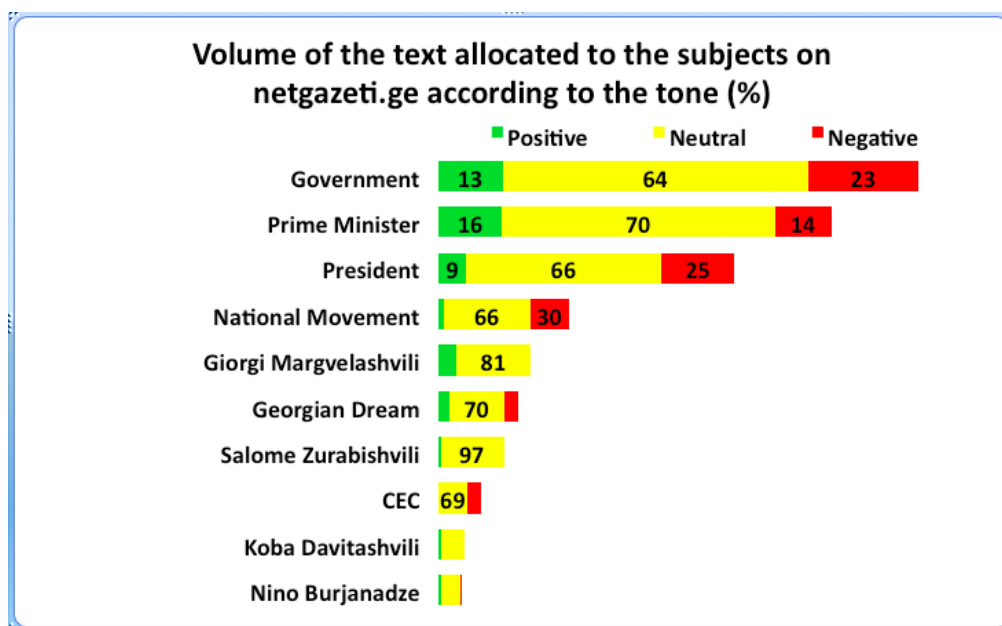
Other than the electoral themes, government activities and legislative amendments should be mentioned among the priority topics.

During this monitoring period netgazeti.ge most intensively covered the activities of the government (28%), the Prime Minister (23%) and the President (17%).

Highest rates of negative tone were reported while covering the President (25%), the National Movement (30%) and the government (23%).

The interest in presidential candidates has much increased in the third monitoring period, but there are two candidates whose activities are most evidently distinguished: Giorgi Margvelashvili, candidate of the ruling team (6%) and Salome Zurbashvili (3%). Coverage of other presidential candidates does not exceed 1%. The website seldom publishes the interviews with presidential candidates; frequency of their coverage only coincides with the campaign activities of candidates.

We may conclude based on the monitoring results that netgazeti.ge provides quite an impartial coverage of political events going on in the country. Standards and ethical norms of journalism are observed.



droni.ge

During the third monitoring period, on one hand the positive attitude towards the President and the National Movement, and on the other hand the negative attitude towards the Prime Minister, the Coalition Georgian Dream and the government is even more evident on droni.ge. Ethical norms and standards of journalism are often violated on the website.

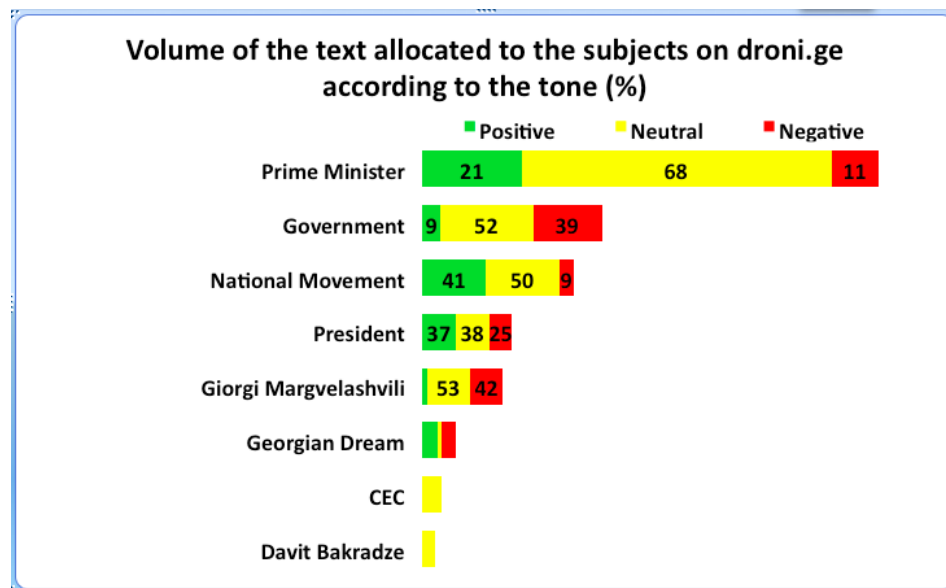
Activities of the Prime Minister (44%), the government (17%), the National Movement (15%) and the President (8%) were most intensively covered during this monitoring period. Among the presidential candidates, Giorgi Margvelashvili (8%) and Davit Bakradze (1%) were most intensively covered.

High rates of negative tone were observed while covering the Coalition Georgian Dream (42%), the government (39%) and the presidential candidate Giorgi Margvelashvili (42%).

Balance of sources is seldom observed in some articles on the website. Besides, we encountered several articles, which created negative disposition to the authorities. Several photo-collages are to be pointed out, which contained negative elements about the government members: e.g. "Did Maia Panjikidze undergo plastic surgeries" (September 2), "Photo without comment: Kakhi Kaladze's Youth" (September 12), also a video about the unmet promises of the Coalition Georgian Dream (September 13).

There are two articles published by the website, which should be considered gross violation of journalistic standards: in these articles the mother of a deceased youth puts blame on Giorgi Margvelashvili, because according to her, the murder was committed by Giorgi Margvelashvili's relative. This article only speaks about accusations against Giorgi Margvelashvili and it does not present any official evidence about the mentioned homicide.

The monitoring results suggest us that droni.ge is quite biased while covering the political events taking place in the country. Ethical norms and standards are regularly violated on this website. It is clearly seen that there is an attempt of discrediting the presidential candidate Giorgi Margvelashvili.



politico.ge

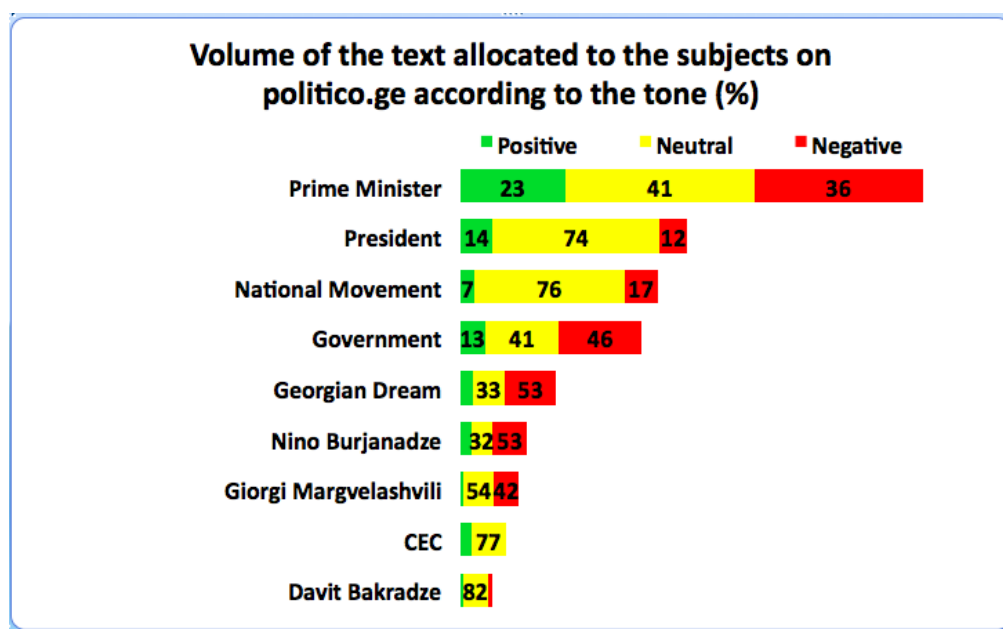
During this monitoring period, the website paid especially big attention to Irakli Alasania's visit to the US and evaluations of the Prime Minister's statement about the Eurasian Union. We encountered quotes with negative context used as headlines on politico.ge during the monitoring (e.g. "Is this man a prime minister or the head of a shopping-mall?" August 19).

The website tries to cover all the significant events happening in the country, and also the activities of representatives of political parties. Our observation leads us to say that there is a positive disposition towards the National Movement on the website.

During the third monitoring period, the website most intensively covered the activities of the Prime Minister (32%), the President (16%), the National Movement (14%) and the government (13%).

High rates of positive tone were observed while covering the President (14%) and the Prime Minister (23%). It is notable that a significant portion of positive tone used for the Prime Minister was caused by the Prime Minister's statements, which are usually reported unchanged by the editorial board (it should be taken into account that the Prime Minister made several broad statements during this monitoring period).

The most intensively covered presidential candidates were Nino Burjanadze (5%), Giorgi Margvelashvili (4%), Davit Bakradze (2%) and Salome Zurabishvili (2%). There are quite high rates of negative tone while covering Nino Burjanadze (53%) and Giorgi Margvelashvili (42%).



liberali.ge

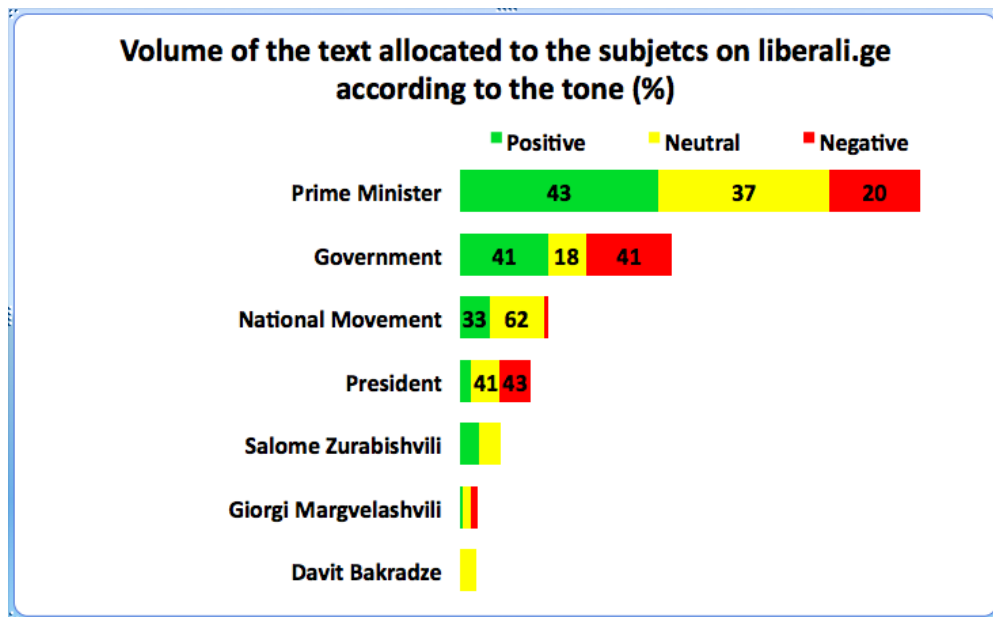
During this monitoring period, there were no facts of gross violation of journalistic ethics identified on liberali.ge. However, scarcity of sources in some articles and superficial coverage of events needs to be pointed out.

The website exhaustively covers the main events of the day. There is a priority topic for the editorial board – education, which stands out among scarce topics. Following issues were actively covered during this monitoring period: sale of Channel 9 by the Prime Minister and CEC's refusal to Salome Zurabishvili's registration as a presidential candidate. Election campaign of presidential candidates was less covered on liberali.ge.

In regards to the volume, the highest rates are reported for the Prime Minister (48%) and the government (22%). As far as the election campaign was less covered on the website, low percentage indicators were distributed among the candidates: Salome Zurabishvili – 4%, Giorgi Margvelashvili 2%, Davit Bakradze – 2%.

There was a quite high rate of positive tone observed while covering the Prime Minister (43%). However, it is noteworthy that during the monitoring period the website published several extensive statements by of the Prime Minister and consequently, indicator of positive tone increased for him. High rates of negative tone were observed while covering the President (43%) and the government (41%). Besides, quite high rate of negative tone was observed while covering the Central Election Commission (74%), which was caused by the negative evaluation of CEC by the presidential candidate Salome Zurabishvili, when things were happening about her registration as a candidate.

The monitoring results let us conclude that liberali.ge provides a more or less balanced and impartial coverage of events taking place in the country. There is no special positive or negative disposition observed to any presidential candidate. Ethical norms of journalism are observed on the website.



news.ge

In fact, news.ge provided active coverage of all the important political events happening in the country during the third monitoring period. Like the previous monitoring periods, the website allocated the largest space to the coverage of activities of the government (32%) and the Prime Minister (20%). However, compared to the previous monitoring periods, the share of coverage of presidential candidates has increased significantly, which can be explained by activating the presidential campaign in general.

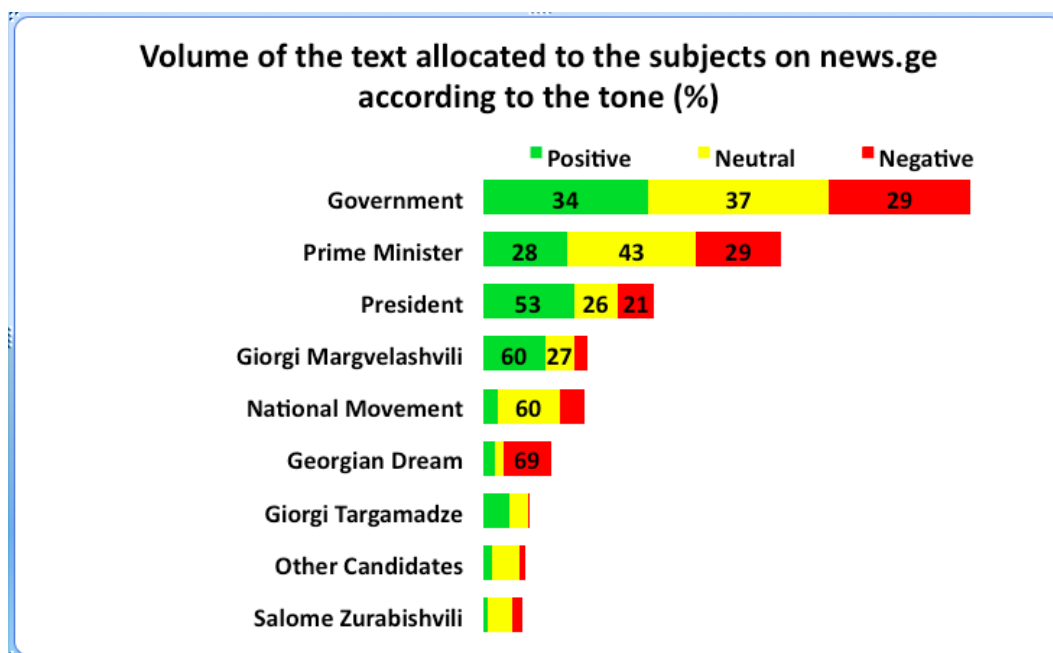
Giorgi Margvelashvili (7%) was most intensively covered on news.ge among the presidential candidates. Relatively less time was dedicated to Davit Bakradze (2%). Election activities of Salome Zurabishvili (3%), Giorgi Targamadze (3%) and Nino Burjanadze (2%) were intensively covered.

It is noteworthy that Giorgi Margvelashvili's coverage tone was mostly positive (60%), because Giorgi Margvelashvili had actively been conducting meetings in the regions and capital city of Georgia by this monitoring period, where his text and speeches were made in mostly positive tone.

At the third stage of monitoring we quite often encountered the articles on news.ge, where the balance of sources was seldom observed. Besides, several cases were observed, when information was not provided by a reliable source and neither was

there any attempt of a journalist to double-check information, which often contained accusations against a certain subject.

It is noteworthy that compared to the previous monitoring periods, there were less articles on news.ge which were prepared based on information obtained from Facebook.



presa.ge

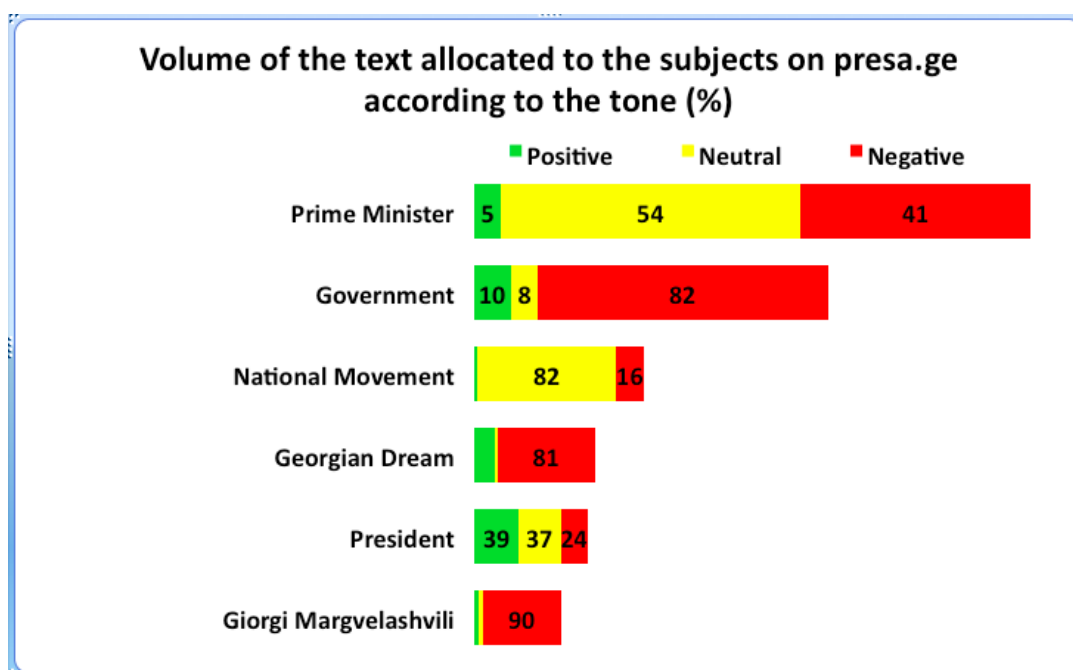
Ethical norms and standards of journalism were regularly breached on presa.ge during the third monitoring period. Diversity of sources is seldom encountered in some articles; information is often unverified and the source of information is unidentified. Besides, often the journalists draw conclusions only based on their own opinions.

Actually, all the articles posted on the website are critical to the government forces. Presa.ge is especially critical towards Giorgi Margvelashvili, presidential candidate of the ruling power, whom the journalists often refer to as “Prime Minister’s Puppet”. The website openly expresses positive disposition to the National Movement. This trend is evidently seen while covering the criminal incidents – all the articles published on this topic lay emphasis on the fact that the crime rate was reduced at the times of previous

authorities, but ineffective performance of the new government supports the growth of crime in the country.

Unprecedented high indicator of negative tone was observed on the website for Giorgi Margvelashvili (90%). In addition, similar high rates were also observed while covering the government (82%) and the Coalition Georgian Dream (81%).

The monitoring results let us conclude that presa.ge provides an imbalanced and biased coverage of national political events. There is a clear attempt to discredit Giorgi Margvelashvili, presidential candidate of the ruling power on the website.



civil.ge

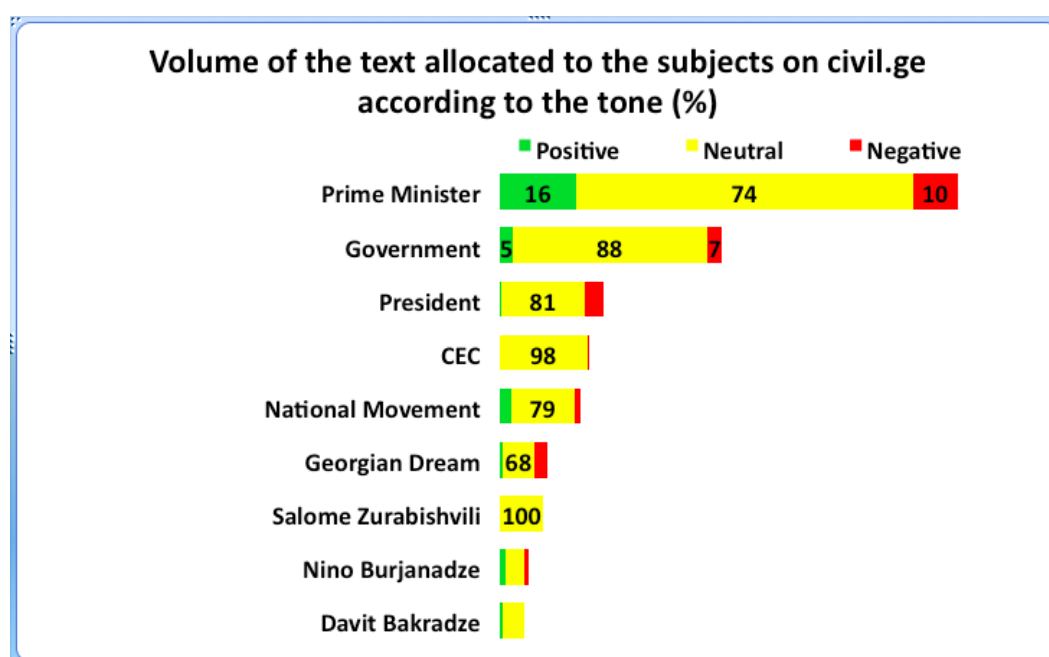
During the third monitoring period, as it was during previous monitoring periods, civil.ge was providing quite balanced and impartial coverage of national political events. There was no clearly shaped positive or negative attitude to any of the political forces on the website. Ethical norms and standards of journalism are highly observed.

Number of analytical articles was even more reduced on website during this monitoring period, and we actually do not see such articles any more. Likewise, critical articles are rare on the website and consequently, the rate of natural tone of coverage of

monitoring subjects is high. Coverage of events taking place in the country was in most cases superficial on civil.ge during the third monitoring period.

Among the monitoring subjects, activities of the Prime Minister (40%), the government (19%) and the President (9%) were most intensively covered. There was no especially high rates of positive or negative coverage of any presidential candidate observed on the website. The highest rate of positive tone was revealed while covering the Prime Minister (16%). However, it is noteworthy that during this monitoring period the Prime Minister published several statements, which correspondingly increased the percentage of positive tone for him.

We can conclude based on the monitoring results that civil.ge provides quite a balanced and unbiased coverage of national political events. Ethical norms of journalism are observed. However, during this monitoring period the website was only limited to the superficial coverage of events, and diversity of sources was rare in the articles.



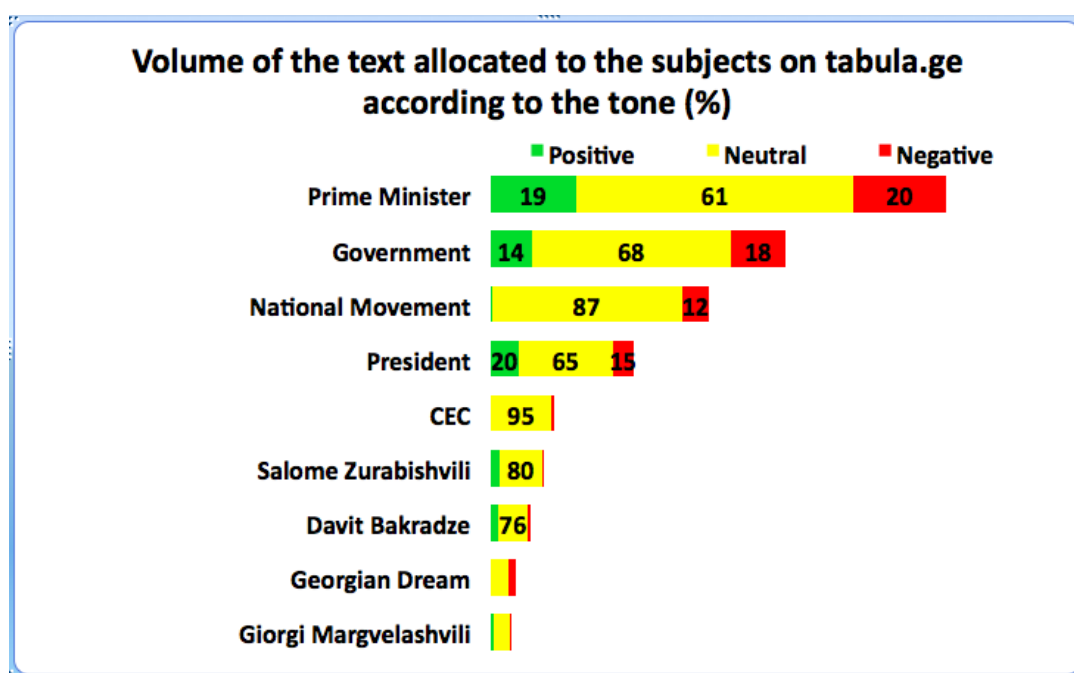
tabula.ge

During this monitoring period, tabula.ge mostly is covering the national events with short articles of news type. Often the articles are accompanied with video reports as well. The website is distinguished with thematic diversity. Balance is mostly observed

in certain articles, but a long-term observation reveals a relatively positive attitude towards the National Movement. Information about arrest and interrogation of representatives of the former authorities is reported intensively and in details. Besides, the issues of suspension of infrastructure projects, which have been initiated by the former authorities, are also covered quite intensively. Respondents' comments are often represented, who are speaking about the pro-Russian disposition of government members. Besides, the website often publishes the articles disseminated in the western media about the detention of former high-rank officials, where the criticism of the new government occupies quite a big place. Laying such emphases on the ongoing processes in the country gives a biased coloring to tabula.ge.

The most intensively covered activities were those of the Prime Minister (33%), the government (24%) and the National Movement (15%). There were no especially high rates of positive or negative tones observed towards any presidential candidate on the website during this monitoring period.

The monitoring results let us conclude that a relatively positive disposition is observed on tabula.ge towards the National Movement. However, it should be pointed out that there were no cases of gross violation of ethical norms and standards of journalism on the website during the monitoring period. Tabula.ge provides more or less impartial coverage of election activities of presidential candidates.



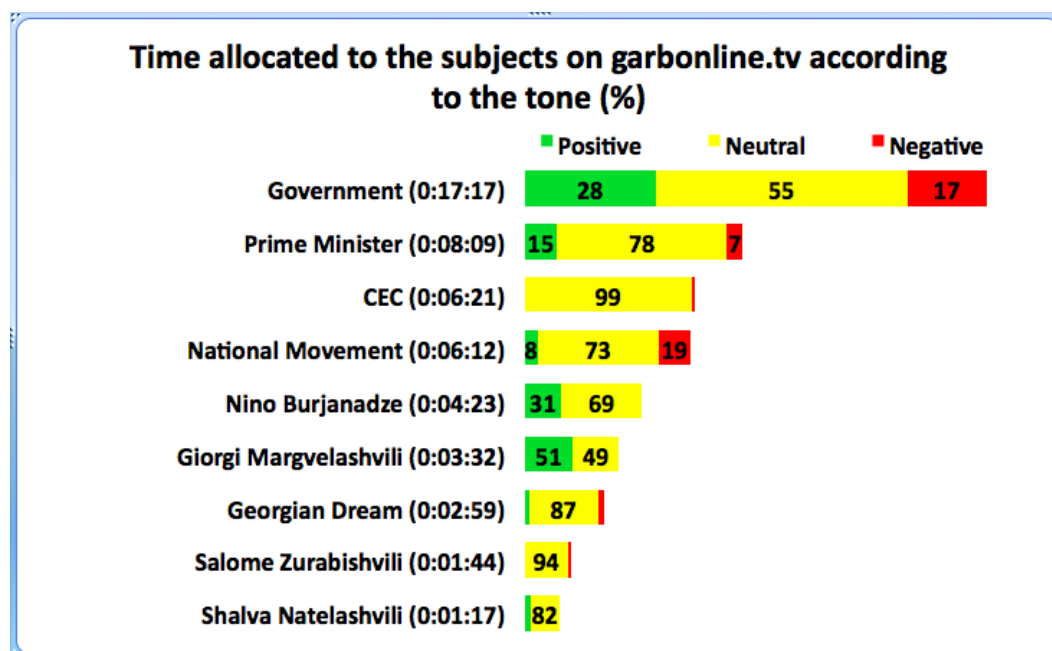
garbonline.tv

(There were maintenance works on the website from August 2 until September 2. Correspondingly, this report covers the period from September 2 until September 17)

During the third monitoring period, number of stories about the activities of presidential candidates increased on garbonline.tv. Majority of videos about the activities of politicians or public officers are mostly short and often represent fragments of materials shot at press conference or election meetings of presidential candidates. Reasoning and comments of journalists increased in the stories during this monitoring period. It is noteworthy that the texts of journalists are prepared in adherence to high journalism standards and ethical norms. The website is covering the political events quite impartially, and there is no positive or negative disposition observed towards any specific political force.

Activities of the government (32%), Prime Minister (15%) and Central Election Commission (12%) were most intensively covered during this monitoring period. There is no special positive or negative attitude observed towards any presidential candidate.

The monitoring results let us conclude that garbonline.tv provides quite an impartial coverage of political events taking place in the country. Ethical norms and standards of journalism are highly observed. However, lack of materials is still observed on the website.



for.ge

During the third monitoring period, as it was in the first and second periods, there is an extremely negative disposition observed clearly on for.ge towards the President and the National Movement. We can draw this conclusion because of the frequency of interviews with respondents who are extremely critical towards the President and the National Movement, also due to quite insulting statements used by the journalists of this website towards the mentioned subjects. This trend is also evident in the headlines, such as: “Helicopter, or usual fairy tales from the pilot Saakashvili” (September 12).

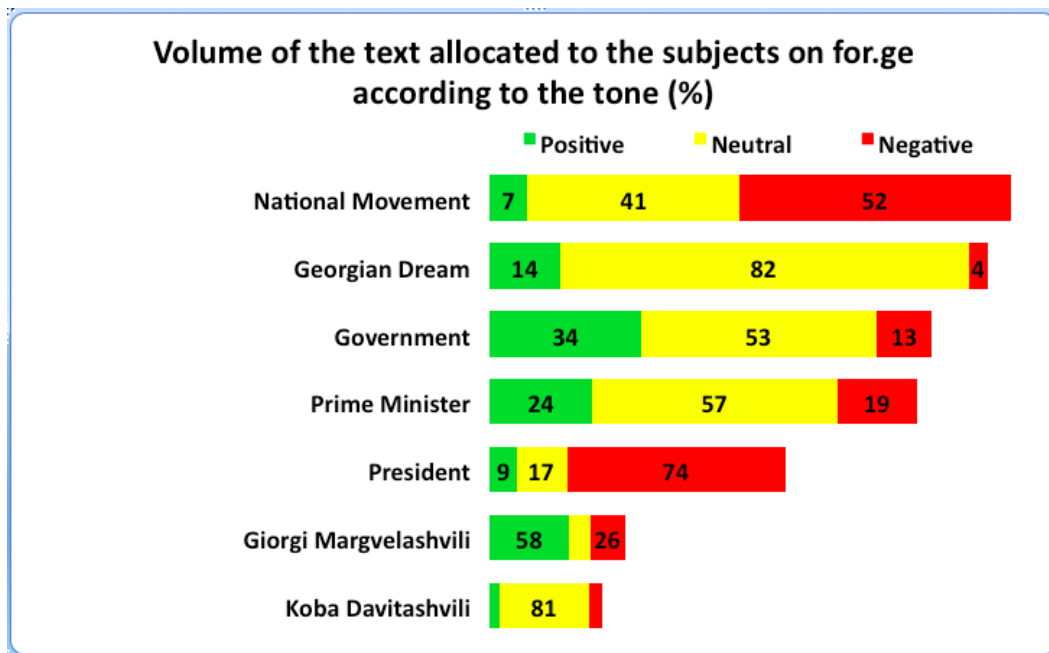
Quite high rates of negative tone were observed on the website while covering the President (74%) and the National Movement (52%).

Balance of sources is seldom observed in the articles published on the website. It is also worth noting that the website often refers to one and the same experts for evaluating the events taking place in the country, and these experts criticize the President and the National Movement actually when talking about any topic.

It should also be pointed out that compared to the previous monitoring period, comments or extensive interviews with the members of National Movement became frequent on the website. Interview with Bacho Akhalaia’s lawyer should be singled out, where Bacho Akhalaia and the National Movement were represented from a positive angle due to the speech of the respondent (August 21).

As for thematic diversity of the website – activities of the Ministry of Defense and Irakli Alasania, Minister of Defense, were covered with particular intensity. There was no such interest observed on the website towards any other state structure.

We can conclude based on the monitoring results that for.ge is providing quite an imbalanced and biased coverage of political events going on in the country. Ethical norms of journalism are regularly violated on the website.



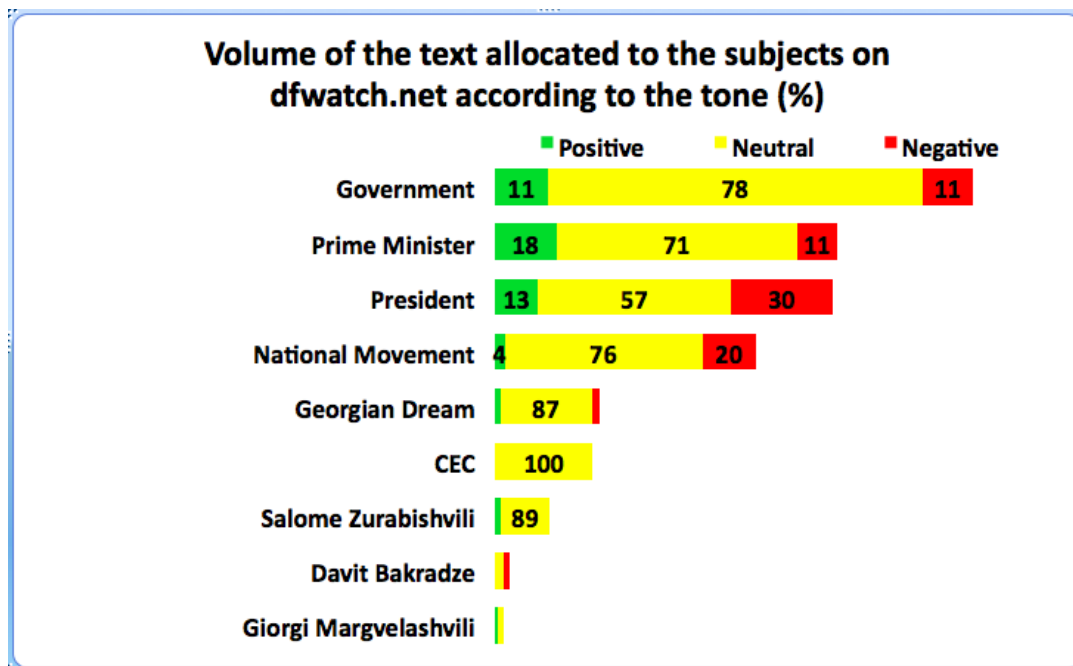
dfwatch.net

Number of analytical articles decreased even more during the third monitoring period, and basically shorter news-like articles were published on the website. Dfwatch.net is providing quite a balanced and impartial coverage of activities of politicians or various state agencies. Ethical norms and standards of journalism are highly observed. Opinions of representatives of various political forces are covered on the website.

During this monitoring period the website most intensively covered the activities of the government (28%), the Prime Minister (20%) and the President (20%). The highest indicators of negative tone were reported while covering the President (30%) and the National Movement (20%). There was no especially positive or negative disposition observed on the website towards any presidential candidate during the third monitoring period.

Like it was during previous monitoring periods, there is a lack of critical approach to the covered issues observed on the website. Correspondingly, the rates of neutral tone are increased while covering the monitoring subjects.

Monitoring results let us conclude that dfwatch.net is covering the political events of the country quite impartially; ethical norms and standards of journalism are maintained. However, it is worth mentioning that the lack of critical approach to issues is observed on the website during this period.



palitrav.ge

Coverage of crime has significantly increased on palitrav.ge during the third monitoring period, as compared to the previous monitoring periods. While covering the crime events, the materials are often transferred directly from the website of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Besides, the website often uploaded the President's speeches during this monitoring period, which resulted in 62% of positive coverage of the President on palitrav.ge.

There was 61% of positive tone observed while covering the government. In this case too, this was caused by covering the video materials disseminated by the MIA, where the performance of the Ministry is mostly evaluated positively.

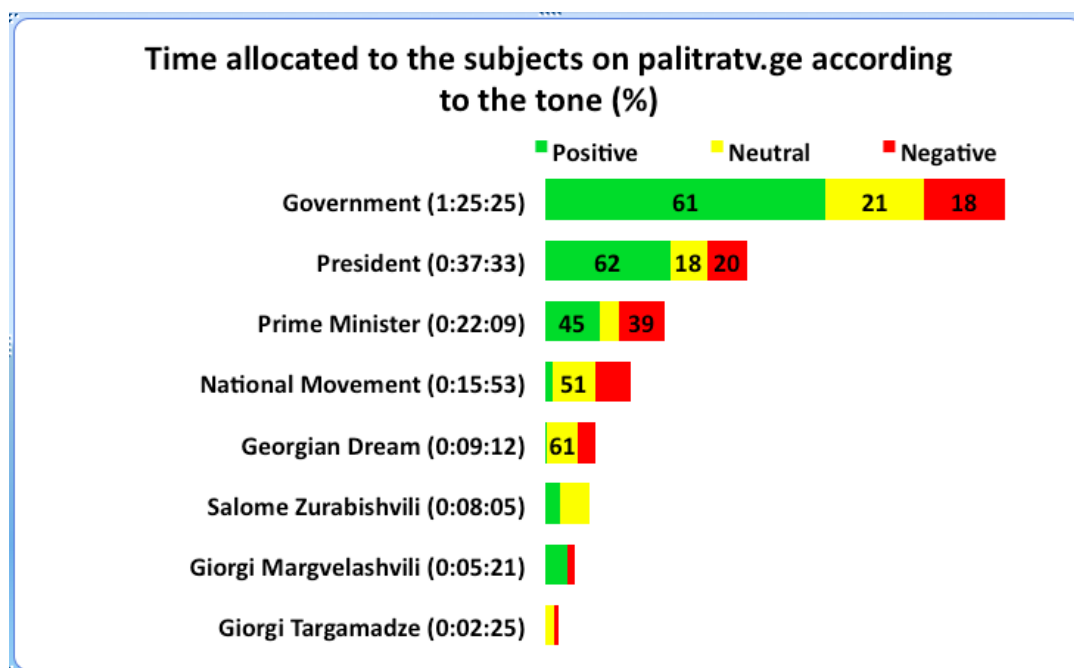
Videos stolen from the air of various TV-companies were often disseminated on the website during this period as well. Some original materials were posted several times, which were prepared by the journalists of the website. However, in most cases we encounter only the shots without a journalist's comment.

Several cases were observed during this monitoring period, when the information was covered on the website only from one side. Among them was the report "Giorgi Margvelashvili is accused of homicide" (September 11), where the mother of a deceased

youth is accusing the presidential candidate of patronizing the murderer. However, there was no official note presented in the story about the homicide; neither was there any attempt to obtain such information in the report.

Unlike the previous monitoring periods, activities of the government (44%) were most intensively covered on palitrav.ge, which is obvious, if we take into account the above-mentioned video materials disseminated by the MIA.

We can conclude based on the monitoring results that palitrav.ge more or less observes the ethical norms of journalism, but we often come across with video materials posted on the website, where unethical vocabulary is allowed without limitations.



Conclusion

Coverage of activities of presidential candidates became more frequent in the Georgian online media during the third monitoring period. Majority of websites covers their activities more or less impartially. The websites droni.ge and presa.ge are the exceptions, where the attempt is clearly observed to discredit Giorgi Margvelashvili, presidential candidate of the Coalition Georgian Dream.

For.ge is distinguished with its one-sided coverage of events, which openly expresses critical disposition of the editorial board towards the President and the National Movement. However, we cannot say that there is a clear attempt to present Davit Bakradze, presidential candidate of the National Movement from a negative angle.

Number of analytical articles decreased on the websites civil.ge and dfwatch.net. These websites were basically limited only to superficial coverage of issues during this monitoring period.

We often encounter the cases of using discriminatory and abusive terminology by the journalists on the websites presa.ge, droni.ge and for.ge. Compared to the previous monitoring periods, cases of violation of journalistic standards have become more frequent on the website droni.ge.

Superficial coverage of issues, lack of sources in some articles and mismatch between the headlines with the text still remain among the main problems of the online media.